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ABSTRACT

Vocational training (VT) programs in Latin America prepare workers to perform middle-level occupations or jobs. VT in Latin America is characterized by the existence of solid and autonomous national institutes linked to the logic of economic production, funded through a payroll levy grant, counting on a tripartite board, and related to ministries of labor. Public and private agencies also dispense VT. In some countries, one institution is responsible for all sectors of the economy. In others, the institutions are divided into three traditional sectors, or specific sectoral institutions appear. VT is a component of production and education processes. A parallel effort to restructuring the global economy of problems should be considered by policymakers, not just a study of short-term social aspects. Vocational training institutes (VTIs) respond to economic challenges by participating in institutional organization. Large firms generally do their own training, so VTIs can concentrate their efforts on small and medium-sized firms. VTIs have developed operational and methodological alternatives and instruments, such as apprenticeships, the German Dual System, distant training, and attention to the informal sector. More diverse funding alternatives should be examined to attend to the wide spectrum of responsibilities and activities. (NLA)

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CURRENT VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN LATIN AMERICA

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For the proposals of this paper we consider as vocational training (VT) any programme to prepare a worker to perform a middle level occupation or job. This occupational universe includes all the positions between semi-skilled and higher skilled workers, comprising both the most simple, specific and operative training and also the more qualified and structured courses where a comprehensive curriculum is inherent. The frontiers with technicians are fluid and frequently the difference is more a question of institutional perspective. The non-formal approach of technical education is taken some times as VT. Presently VT has little or none articulation with different levels of formal education.

Despite some particular differences existing in the various countries of the region, it is possible to consider an specific Latin American institutional model of VT.

The basic traits are:

1. A solid institutional structure parallel to Regular Education.
2. Autonomy of administration vis-a-vis the State.
3. A levy grant established by law, related to the payroll of enterprises.
4. The existence of a generally tripartite Board. (Participation of social actors as strategy).
5. A rich volume of technological and methodological instruments, and operational modalities created from a framework different to Regular Education.
6. A crucial linkage with the world of labour and production, from which VT extracts its spirit and motivation. (Reproduction of work as methodology)
7. Institutional relation with the ministries of Labour.

NOTE: This paper has benefitted from the results of researchs held by Cinterfor and the product of discussions with the staff of the Centre, but does not represent the official opinion of the Centre or the staff.

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In brief, VT in Latin America is characterised by the existence of solid and autonomous national institutes essentially linked to the logic of economic production, funded through a payroll levy grant, counting on a tripartite Board and generally related to ministries of Labour.

Those institutes are not the only entities dispensing VT. They share the task with a number of public and private agencies and even more with the enterprises' own initiatives. But they are the most important individual agencies for the resources accumulated and the institutional capacity to face extended purposes.

In some countries a sole institution is responsible for all the sectors of the economy. In others the institutions are divided into the three traditional sectors, and yet in other cases specific sectoral institutions appear.

In countries like Mexico and Uruguay there is an intention to split the institutions into two groups: those depending on young individuals being prepared to enter the market, and those for adults already in the Economic Active Population (EAP).

As stated before, some variations are present nowadays:

A few governments, through the ministries of Labour, try to establish National Systems, with the aim of coordinating initiatives and proposing priorities and policies, concerning social and economic affairs. In some cases they also have responsibility for the administration of incentive mechanisms for enterprises tax reductions.

In Mexico the Ministry of Labour manages a Federal Law encouraging the enterprises to offer training to their workers. The Ministry is supporting the creation of voluntary employers' agencies throughout the country to promote vocational training in a private basis.

In Chile a governmental agency (SENCE) manages the use of incentive mechanisms of tax reduction, approving programme proposals coming from enterprises and credentiating a fair number of training agencies to compete for the freed resources. The traditional great institute (INACAP) must compete in the same way and on the same conditions as all the other private agencies. INACAP is administered presently by the Employer Chamber and has lost the grant delivered by previously existent law.

In Venezuela the INCE is organised on a Solar System Basis with a central institute and more or less autonomous sectoral institutes, linked to the

respective employers' and/or workers' federations. Central INCE is becoming more and more the Regulator of a wide system.

Considering the present trend to privatisation of services, regionalisation and decentralisation, the original institutes (SENAI and SENAC from Brazil, created respectively in 1942 and 1946) are perhaps the most conservative and at the same time the most advanced. They were created by the State and transferred immediately to the responsibility of the employers' administration with flexibility of structure and a vital capacity of adaptation to the emerging conditions of economic adjustments. The government reserves the control of accounts and exhibits a certain power of pressure to indicate priorities or commitments to national plans. A Training National Board created by the government in 1975 was dismissed years ago. New arrangements are being studied currently.

In a certain way, VT is considered equally a component of production and an education process. In fact, the contribution of a qualified performance by workers and professionals has a tremendous impact on the quality of the product, the logic of the production, the elimination of accidents, and machinery breakdowns. Indeed, this is one argument to justify the inclusion of training costs as a component of production.

On the other hand, the social aspects of country problems are important issues to be considered by governments and institutes. Currently this aim presents some implementation difficulties. Structural adjustments in the countries of the region have been concentrated more on correcting short-term maladjustments, particularly inflation, than on growth and promotion of structural change. Social costs of those decisions were assumed disproportionately by workers and middle-income strata.

Anyway a parallel effort to restructuring the global economy is underway in most of the countries. The main process is to articulate the promotion of industrial reconversion with an opening up of national economies to world markets. The policies stress the modernisation of the economies through the improvement of productivity, quality and competitiveness, together with the reduction of State intervention and disregulation of economy in general and labour market in particular.

Vocational training institutions (VTIs) are challenged to respond to this complexity of economic features, most times on ad hoc basis. The most important movements these VTIs are promoting represent a determined effort to attract social actors to participate at different levels and in different instances of institutional organisation, in respect of programme destination and contents.

Employers and workers are being called on to help in the definition of priorities and the structuring of programmes. At least in one case (CONET, Argentina) the institute is transferring the administration of specialised centres to the respective workers' organisations. In Venezuela and Mexico specific civil associations are being created to support and to orient VT initiatives. In Costa Rica a complex structure of links has been established to enable access of workers and employers to the activities of the INA. VTIs are aware of the need to respond quickly and appropriately to social and economic transformations. And they are trying to explore routes beyond their traditional role.

They have created very innovative instruments and training mechanisms. To cater to technological change, they have transformed the traditional centres into new ones dedicated to multifunctional services, such as providing technical assistance to enterprises, transferring technological information, improving research generally linked to enterprises' demands, selling products obtained through training processes, and last but not least, offering training to key personnel.

This essential commitment to economic adjustments and enterprises' dynamics have produced certain effects on VTI trends:

- Pre-employment training is losing importance with regard to upgrading training for workers already in the labour market.

- Training for middle management, technicians and technologists, at higher levels of professional hierarchy is preferred to traditional training for skilled and semi-skilled workers.

- Training responsibilities are increasingly being transferred to enterprises, changing the main roles and functions of VTIs.

- Activities are increasingly organised by sectors.

- Small and medium-sized enterprises are receiving greater attention and resources.

- VTIs are becoming providers of non-training services, assuming new roles in the structure of economic process, of course without limiting their original objectives.

Some VTIs have technical educational centres, generally specialised in specific areas of production and for a limited number of techniques. In these cases the formal relationship with the Regular Education System is evident. But the

relationships in general are improving as a consequence of the options for higher level workers, necessarily secondary school graduates. Greater market demands (sometimes exaggerated in respect of the actual requirements of jobs) will be leading VTIs to more selective recruitment and a higher degree of dependence on Regular System. In this way, VTIs are in some cases rising above the ceiling of skilled workers and supervisors, who were their traditional clientele at the initial stages.

Larger enterprises generally have their own training structures and VTIs take the role of encouraging the development of these training units, preparing instructors in didactic issues, helping to assess training needs, providing teaching materials, etc.

But as only the large enterprises are in a position to take over direct training, VTIs concentrate their efforts on attending small and medium-sized firms. As a second consequence, the adoption of sectoral approach (mainly through internal departmentalisation) allows them to respond more precisely to the special requirements that exhibit the excessive functional differentiation existing in the economy. Management training is, of course, a critical point and VTIs had no suitable skills to competitively handle fields such as administration, operations, credit management and marketing to follow enterprises' dynamism. At present VTIs are making serious efforts to gain recognition regarding these issues, in the entrepreneurial environment.

Despite the inevitable inertia of any large organisation for public services with a protected market, VTIs have managed with advantages over the majority of educational institutions, to keep pace with the transformation taking place in the environment. Some critics have considered these institutes inefficient and inflexible compared with private alternatives, but studies were never conclusive and private opportunities are limited and partial when the complete active population must be contemplated. The great challenge has been to demonstrate capability to dialogue with different interlocutors from employers' and workers' organisations, from specialised governmental agencies and other social sectors, and the decision to open up to the immediate environment.

The financial conception of VTIs is not an issue free of conflict. New trends in public administration like in certain cases the centralisation of fiscal funds, decentralisation of budgets, and the elimination of subisidies and taxes with specific destinations, impose severe control of public spending. On different occasions, governments have tried to cancel or intervene in the way VTIs are supported. The idea of adopting a relationship different from the payroll tax, for instance a linkage with productivity, or with added value, has been brought up, but difficulties in measurement have been a

barrier. Anyway VTIs have been endeavouring to diversify funds, but without significant results so far.

VTIs have developed large number of operational and methodological alternatives and instruments, consolidating the conception of out-school frameworks. The essential trait has always been to give more flexibility to formative strategies and to warrant conditions as similar as possible to actual labour. The use of the logic of the work process as a didactic instrument is the proper characteristic of VTIs. Doing is an essential part of learning. The reproduction of the real situation of work has dominated training strategies, such as training enterprises of SENAC or training/production enterprises of more general practice.

Apprenticeship was initially the core modality of VTIs. This way of training was based on the good relationships between schools and enterprises. Theoretically the object of learning at school would meet the practical level at the real world of work. The question arising from this side should indicate the subjects to the school journey. A good articulation of both has never been obtained in the region, and this modality surmounted an enourmous crisis in the 70s.

Recently, the German cooperation is encouraging the apprenticeship in a more specific way, renamed as Dual System. The relationship school-firm must be more accurate and the commitments of apprenticeship should be defined in terms of a concrete agreement, a plan of apprenticeship with responsibilities defined to employers and school authorities. At this moment that modality is being carried out with relative success in many institutions. Important adjustments were introduced by supervisors.

Distant training is also becoming a strategic modality of training considering the geographic distribution of population and the difficulties of individuals to articulate work and school.

A recent challenge to the traditional VTIs has been the governmental demand to pay attention to the so-called informal sector. Working with this part of population requires special approaches not familiar to those institutions. Generally training alone is no sufficient to solve the problems arising from illiteracy, poverty, absence of the habit of working, diversity of interests, etc. NGOs are more linked to these groups but VTIs are under pressure to channel resources and attention to them.

At the moment the results to be presented are not yet sufficient to recognise VTIs proficiency. Some exercises have been carried out, but in general with small groups, and in artificial situations provided by the experimental

environment. The best expectations are put on initiatives where training is associated to other services, such as social organisation, cooperativism, credit, etc.

To attend this wide spectrum of responsibility and activities, VTIs are yet limited to the traditional payroll levy grant which responds for the almost totality of budget. In some cases VTIs use incentive law to tax deduction depending on the enterprises initiative. This instrument is more profited by private training agencies and the own enterprises. In the near future VTIs perhaps will be changing the present situation to more diverse funding alternatives.

It is fair to underline in the case of Latin América the role played by Cinterfor in the promotion of the transfer of training methodologies, in the exchange of experiences, among institutions of the region, in the encouragement of research and innovations, as well as in helping to introduce new policies and strategies, enabling the access to external experiences mainly through the link with the Turin Centre, and creating and maintaining a general culture of VT and labour.